



CALL TO WORSHIP

Today we gather to sing in words ancient and modern

**The parables of new life we have heard all our lives**

Stories of courage and delight and purpose

**Stories of fear and shadows and pain**

Stories which echo our lives and our times

**Stories of unconditional love and intentional grace**



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## OPENING RESPONSES

The journey continues on which we are invited to travel

**Taking each step is an adventure**

Many walk this journey together

**Each seeking transformation**

Let us trust the new life journeying brings

**New life for you and for me and for all the world**



## LIGHTING THE FOURTH ADVENT CANDLE: LOVE

**Read the Partner Story from the South India: For Gender Equality**

For years, most south Indian girls suffered in silence. Their brothers ate the best food, attended school and did fewer chores. When they grew up, the same patterns continued. It was not fair. The number of violent attacks on women are increasing. EKTA has been a lifeline to men and women wanting change. They do the research, educate men and women about gender, and run successful campaigns to stop discrimination based on gender and make the city of Madurai safer. Already they have lobbied local government to set up a desk at a major bus station to help children who are lost or in danger of being trafficked. **Be the Lifeline to women and men seeking safety and fairness.**

**Lighting the Advent Candle of Love**

For those who look for love, but are abused,

For those who have lost family and friends,

For those who live where there is strife or war,

We light the candle of love.

*Light the candle.*

**You, Lord Jesus, renew our love, and pour love into the world.**

**May this light signal a breakthrough, a brighter future,**

**A new order and a better way.**

## THE READINGS

**Micah 5: 2-5a** Micah was a young contemporary of Isaiah who was concerned with ethical issues. Coming from the borderland of Judah in the north where the Assyrians are closer (v. 5 b), he was much more aware of what the enemy was up to than Israel's wealthy and powerful leadership in Jerusalem. He told his audience to listen to the small and the marginal voices for true information. Bethlehem (v.2) home to one of the small clans, was the place to be if peace is to come (5 a).

**Psalms 80:1-7:** This psalm could have been written at a time when the northern kingdom of Judah was under threat from the Assyrians. It is a call for help from the tribes who are worried about their safety (v.6).

**Hebrews 10: 5-10** For the writer of Hebrews, the old practices of sacrifice have no value. God can be found in the world through Christ (v.5a). God does not want animal sacrifices but obedience to God's will (v.7).

**Luke 1: 39-45(46-55)** In the story that we know as the visitation is so familiar, we may miss the unusual. Mary appears to travel alone to the hill country – something highly unusual for the time – suggesting strong bonds of love between the two kinswomen. Normally their discussion would be seen as women's business – certainly not worth recording in such detail. Elizabeth in v.45 acknowledges Mary's faith and obedience to God's will. Mary displays this in the words from v.46-55 which form the Magnificat, a revolutionary song of liberation. These powerful words of hope have provided strength for many people living in violent places where hunger is present.

## SERMON NOTES

Christmas is very close but there is one Sunday left to pay attention to this story of faith. The heartfelt encounter between Elizabeth and Mary inspires us with hope. Focusing on the theme of love, we are reminded of the importance of relationships. Bonds of friendship can breakdown our fear and concerns. They can also be the basis for the much-needed actions that can bring change to the world.

The mood of these readings is one of encouragement. Like Mary and Elizabeth, we can find the strength for a different future where women have value and faith of their own. Even as we prepare for our own Christmas celebrations, let us look for inspiration from people living in more

vulnerable places. The love that we find in Mary's words could drive us to new actions to end violence and exploitation.

- Where do I find myself in these texts? On the edge of danger? Safe with friends? Am I Mary or Elizabeth? Or?
- How can I share the urgency of the need for action to stop violence in a new way?
- What commitment can I make to the goal for gender equality this Christmas?

## PARTNER STORY: BE THE LIFELINE FOR GENDER JUSTICE

*Education is one of the cornerstones of EKTA's work to eradicate poverty – girls, women and others are relegated to second-class citizens – they work longer hours, earn less money, have no power in decision-making, and are often subject to violence. By working with students they have seen change happen – improved respect for each other, safer homes and public facilities, stronger legislation and campaigns to stop violence based on gender. At a time when tensions are increasing within their city, EKTA is working hard to increase tolerance and understanding across the many communities where they work.*

EKTA staff are familiar figures on the Kamarajar University campus in the city of Madurai, south India. One fixture on their schedule is a media class. Head of the Communications Department Dr Nagarathinam warmly welcomes three EKTA staff members to the room where they meet. He encourages the 25 students to participate fully in a workshop that will help them explore the

role the media has in contributing to gender relations in their communities.



Used to listening to lectures and displaying their intellectual knowledge, the Masters and PhD students are thrown by the first question: "What do you like about yourself?" There is silence before tentative answers from a few brave students.

The second question is harder: "What changes would you like to see in Madurai (the city where they live)?" Eventually, they arrive at 'a casteless, equal society' – without qualification or detail. By this time

the students know the teaching method is as different as the content.

EKTA coordinator Bimla Chandrasekar divides the class into smaller groups. Each group is to draw a male and female figure and list their attributes. The answers are predictable: men are stronger and dominant, women submissive and good looking.

With the stereotypes on the table, the class is ready to explore how they have been formed over time, especially through social institutions like the media, and what they mean for women and men. More discussion follows watching a video and studying news items to identify the ways they portray gender roles. It is a simple lesson perhaps, but important for young people finding their place in an industry that has the power to shape perceptions and behaviour.

This media class is only one on a busy schedule. In the course of the year, EKTA will engage 1,000 -1,500 students of all ages on gender issues. From playing games like netball to more academic study, they have many ways of engaging students who want to make society better.

Interested students get more involved. EKTA trains interns who in turn work with others. College students are encouraged to audit part of their campus, examining how the spaces are used by young women and men and preparing a 'vulnerability map' of the unsafe spaces. Others will audit a public facility for gender safety.

For the last few years, they have chosen one of Madurai's main bus shelters for their practical exercise. The students spend time observing and talking to passengers. After analysing their results, the group devises recommendations to discuss with their trainers before developing an action plan with EKTA.

In five years, the students and EKTA have achieved cleaner facilities, increased police presence, a schedule that ensures women can get off under a streetlight at night, and this year a shelter for deserted children to help prevent child trafficking (*pictured at top*).

**Be the Lifeline to men and women campaigning to end violence and for the safety and rights of women and girls in their communities. Leave no one behind.**



## EKTA

Formed in 1990, EKTA has a strong reputation for its work on gender justice, focusing on governance, human rights and masculinity. The organisation works in Madurai and in rural villages where there are few educational opportunities and little support for young men and women who may have survived abuse. After the South Asia tsunami in 2004, they set up a boarding school for Dalit and Tribal girls at the request of their families.

Discrimination based on gender begins before birth in India where girl babies are more likely to be aborted. In the most recent figures, the ratio of live babies born tipped further toward boys. 898 girl babies were born per 1000 boys, compared with 906 in 2012-14. As girls grow up they

continue to face discrimination, watching their brothers eat better food, doing more work, and missing school. In Tamil Nadu, the *Sumangali* scheme enables families to send their young daughters to work in exploitative conditions in the textile industry for example, with the promise of money for their dowry if they last the distance.

EKTA is playing a statewide coordinating role on SDG5 (see below), undertaking research and bringing together NGOs, universities and public officials for better gender outcomes.

EKTA coordinates local events on international campaigns including the annual [One Billion Rising](#) push to stop violence against women and girls (pictured above). The event inspires women of all ages to be strong and support each other for gender justice. It includes an action related to the audit of a public facility by students under EKTA's guidance. This year the local authorities opened a lost children's office at the Periya Bus Shelter which is run by EKTA under contract.

***“Increasingly, it is certain that unless young men and boys work together and alongside women and young girls to empower women and girls and eradicate the unjust and oppressive gender based stereotypes of the past, the realization of true gender equality will still remain a distant dream.”***

**EKTA**

## SDG 5: GENDER EQUALITY

The 2018 Appeal puts the spotlight on our responsibilities to each other and the planet our home. In 2015, the United Nations agreed to a new agenda for sustainable development made up of 17 Sustainable Development Goals.



Goal 5 is a [commitment](#) to achieve equality and empower all women and girls. Equality is about realising their basic human rights and crucial for a peaceful, prosperous, and sustainable world. When girls and women have equal access to education, decent work, healthcare and political rights, they can make a greater contribution to global well-being.

According to [UNWomen](#), 1 in 5 women aged 15-49 years reported physical and/or sexual violence across 87 countries, and 49 countries have no laws specifically protecting women from violence. Eliminating

all forms of violence against women and girls, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation is one target under SDG5. Other targets cover discrimination against women and girls, recognising paid and unpaid work, sharing responsibilities in raising children and the home, women's full participation in leadership and decision-making and universal access to sexual and reproductive health. In addition, the goal covers rights over land and economic resources as well as policies to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls.

Globally [in 2017](#), an estimated 21 percent of women between 20 and 24 years of age reported that they were married or in an informal union before age 18. This means



that an estimated 650 million girls and women today were married in childhood. Rates of child marriage have continued to decline around the world. In Southern Asia, a girl's risk of marrying in childhood has dropped by over 40 per cent since around 2000.

*“Gender justice is achieved when women and men, girls and boys have equal enjoyment of human rights, responsibilities, life prospects and opportunities, and the power and resources to shape their own lives and contribute to society, irrespective of gender or sex. Gender justice seeks to see all people free from cultural and interpersonal systems of privilege and oppression, and from violence and repression based on gender.”*

[Side by Side Advocacy Briefing](#)

## AFFIRMATION OF FAITH

**Any time of year is good for welcoming new life,  
whether in golden glow of autumn leaves,  
or fresh white snow of winter,  
or the freshness of spring green**

**Summer is a time of fullness and light  
abundance of light, sun and sparkle of sea  
and reflection from sand.**

**So may we allow our hearts to be full and light,  
affirming welcome and openness  
showering hospitality over all who come near us.**

**Let us allow our hearts to be gently warmed by this summer sun  
affirming acceptance and embrace by this baby son  
affirming life which always is,  
in which we can always be**

## PRAYERS FOR OUR PARTNERS

Loving God, whether we are male or female,  
you have gifted us with intelligence, energy and the capacity for love.  
Yet these wonderful gifts can be blocked by those who are afraid  
Of losing their power and privilege.  
Girls are denied education and opportunities.  
Women are treated as things and subjected to violence.  
Those who point out and challenge the inequity are laughed at, threatened, or worse.

Around the world there are women and girls who are terribly vulnerable.  
Yet we believe that yours is a love that can transform  
The lives of oppressors as well as victims.

We pray that communities who hold back their girls and women  
will wake up to the good that they are missing out on.

We pray for EKTA and its work in Madurai in South India,  
For courage and wisdom for its workers and for those whom they help.  
We pray that you would improve lives through their work of advocacy and support,  
And we pray that the lives that are improved will improve the lives of others.

....

This is our prayer in the name of Jesus – your Word on love to the world.

## SENDING FORTH

We travel together  
towards the new birth, towards the new start  
We follow the signs which show us the way  
***To do what is right***  
***To seek justice***  
***To walk humbly with God.***  
***We go in peace. Amen.***

## NOTES

Special thanks to Rev Dr Susan Jones for the opening liturgies, and Rev Clare Lind and the people of Tawa Union for the candelighting, prayers for partners, and the Hope banner. Under the leadership of Roy Bridge who has a background in emergency management and response, the people created the banner. The backdrop is a silver foil space blanket is the primary symbol - a reflection of equality. The secondary symbol of shelter and warmth/comfort for injured patients. The Life ring O links with lifeline (rope) which is the final piece connecting all four together

**Join the Lifeline so all people have food, water, dignity and lives free of violence. Leave no one behind. Support the [Christmas Appeal](#).**

